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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER ON UN ISSUES FOR LIBERIA VISIT OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL, MAY 19-20, 2009

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Brooks Robinson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) America has always had a special place in the hearts of Liberians and that esteem has grown since the end of the civil war. Thousands of Liberians found refuge in the United States during the war, and around 400,000 Liberians, from a population of fewer than four million, now call America home.

The United States expedited Charles Taylor's departure by sending Marines to facilitate the arrival of Nigerian peacekeepers, and advocated deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Liberians appreciate that the United States is the country's leading donor, with bilateral assistance since 2003 of over \$1 billion plus an equal amount in assessed contributions to support UNMIL. American aid targets security and judicial sector reform, education, health, and overall economic revitalization, including infrastructure rehabilitation.

¶2. (U) Progress is clear. The Department supported elimination of UN sanctions on Liberian timber and diamond exports and is working to create the monitoring program that will keep those resources from funding future violence. Electrical power is slowly returning to Monrovia, with U.S. and other funding, and the main roads are being repaved with World Bank funds. The number of commercial flights is increasing, and Delta Airlines may begin service later this year.

¶3. (C) Despite the progress, Liberia remains a fragile state. Liberian security forces will require additional staffing, training and equipment to secure the gains made in establishing peace and security. Other donors, mainly China, vie for influence in Liberia but share our commitment to stability and growth. President Sirleaf has been particularly astute in maintaining a beneficial relationship with China while ensuring that Liberia remains firmly aligned with the United States, and our relations with our Chinese counterparts are collegial. France and Great Britain also view a stable Liberia as important for the security of their interests in the region, and other European presence is increasing. All donor partners coordinate closely and are committed to establishing a stable, peaceful and prosperous Liberia.

¶4. (C) From our meetings with the recently-concluded Technical Assessment Mission (TAM), we have the impression the TAM shares our conclusion that the situation in Liberia remains far too fragile for a precipitous UNMIL withdrawal. Perhaps both President Sirleaf and UNMIL are victims of their own success; President Sirleaf by providing donors and investors the confidence to take risks in Liberia, and UNMIL by maintaining peace and stability so well that it can be taken for granted.

Inclusion is Key

¶5. (C) Perhaps the most difficult challenge for President Sirleaf is to maintain the confidence of the Liberian people

that all will benefit from her economic and political initiatives. Too often we hear that the old elite, who found safe haven in the United States or elsewhere during the war, are now returning to retake their prerogatives. The reality is far more complex: a delicate balance of power has emerged between the established families and the warlords who created their power bases during the war and whose representatives now serve in the Legislature and even the Cabinet. As evidence of change, Liberian society is the most open it has ever been. The press, including radio, is free and frequently (albeit often irresponsibly) criticizes the government. The government, through outreach such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations, is making unprecedented efforts to include formerly ignored or marginalized populations, holding meetings in each county and specifically with women, elders, youth, the business community and civil society organizations.

¶6. (C) Liberia cannot return to the 1970's status quo, where a few families controlled the resources while indigenous Liberians from the "hinterland" remained uneducated and without hope of having political and economic influence. Samuel Doe's 1980 coup and the civil war that began in 1990 ripped the oligarchy from power, but the former families are back, they still have power (and land), and many have mixed feelings about sharing access to resources with their fellow Liberians. Liberians must recast themselves as members of a peaceful, prosperous, diverse West African state that has a unique relationship with the United States, but also works closely with their democratic neighbors. Despite almost six years of peace, Liberians remain wary, fearing this is just another lull before the country again falls into violent chaos. The desire for reform is tempered by fear of change. This ambivalence must be confronted quickly, or Liberia will be unable to attract the talent and the investment needed to create a brighter future (especially jobs) for Liberians so they will not be lured back into conflict.

Peace and Security

¶7. (U) Under the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the United States was given the lead to establish a 2,000 soldier Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) outside of the UN system. To date, slightly over 2,000 troops have been recruited, vetted and trained in basic military skills. Once SSR training is complete (by December), the U.S. contractors will be phased out and the United States will continue training through active duty military mentors and traditional mil-to-mil training programs. At that point, UNMIL will also participate in the training.

¶8. (U) However, the AFL will not be a fully operational, independent army any time soon. Senior officers need to be selected so the command structure can mature. By 2012, the AFL should be sufficiently trained at the company level to allow for some joint patrolling with UNMIL, relieving UNMIL of some of the burden.

¶9. (C) The 2,000 figure was chosen only for budgetary reasons, without regard to a threat assessment. A more reasonable number based on likely threats would be closer to 5,000, but the GOL has not yet demonstrated that it can sustain even the present number. For that reason, it appears most practical to leave the number as it is, and grow the number when the GOL can afford it. The other alternative, adding 3,000 ill-trained, ill-equipped and under-paid soldiers to the AFL would create more problems than it would solve. We understand that President Sirleaf and the TAM have come to the same conclusion.

Police Issues - a Weak Link

¶10. (SBU) Progress on rebuilding the Liberia National Police (LNP) remains slow, despite efforts by UNMIL, the United States and other donors to turn the LNP into an effective

democratic force. At 3,800 recruits, the LNP force is too small to fulfill its mandate, which would require a minimum of 6,000. However, the GOL cannot even sustain the current number and the sight of police soliciting bribes to survive is common. The police are not well equipped, and lack sufficient communications or mobility. The LNP's ability to investigate crimes remains rudimentary, and the judicial system is unable to effectively prosecute cases that are investigated.

¶11. (C) President Sirleaf has recognized the problem, and plans to remove present Inspector General of Police Munah Sieh-Browne (the only female police chief in Africa) with a younger man from the National Security Agency. (He is currently finishing a ten-month USG-sponsored training program in the U.S.) Sirleaf has also repeatedly indicated that she would like a lead country, preferably the U.S. but possibly the UK, to take over the rebuilding of the LNP as the U.S. has done with the AFL. For us to assume UNMIL's responsibility for police would require a funds at a level similar to that of our SSR program (at \$50 million each of the last two fiscal years). Therefore, there is no feasible alternative to continued UNMIL oversight. What we can do, however, is take more of a leadership role in coordinating with UNMIL.

¶12. (SBU) We have had some success using this model. Under UN auspices, the United States has taken the lead in training and equipping an armed Emergency Response Unit (ERU), using \$5 million in FY 2007 supplemental and additional INCLE funds (and an additional 1 million Euros from Ireland). Training began in January 2008, and the first 210 of a projected 500-officer force are operational. The U.S. UNPOL contingent designed lesson plans for the training, chose trainers from other national contingents to conduct the training, drafted the Standard Operating Procedures and, once the ERU was operational, has led the advisor team for the ERU.

UNMIL Drawdown

¶13. (C) The preliminary Phase III drawdown plan proposed by the SYG is premised on the fact that UNMIL will need to provide significant logistical and security support for the October 2011 Presidential and Legislative elections. While support for the elections is not presently part of UNMIL's mandate, successful elections are key to Liberia's future, and it is our assessment that the elections will not succeed without UNMIL's help carrying out the elections. The TAM told us in their outbrief they agreed.

¶14. (C) In the several by-elections we observed, the GOL had to pull resources from other areas of the country, which would not be possible in a national election. Even then, UNMIL logistical support was essential. Presidential elections will bring a higher turnout, more scrutiny and higher tensions than the by-elections, and require far more resources than the GOL will command.

¶15. (C) Given this reality, we agree with the premise that UNMIL requires a presence in all 15 counties to provide security throughout the election period. After the elections, when the police have asserted more authority in the outlying areas and the AFL can begin joint patrols, the policy can be revisited during a fourth phase of the drawdown.

¶16. (C) The TAM has also briefed us that they saw little fat to cut from UNMIL. They recognized that logistics in Liberia are far more challenging than in the surrounding countries, and they saw no mission creep by UNMIL into development. Development is carried out by the traditional UN agencies, who need UNMIL to provide the logistical and security support without which they could not perform their functions. The UNSC will hear in Buchanan how the major investors would not have invested without the presence of UNMIL, and would cut their losses and leave if they believed a premature UNMIL exit would create instability. Even the U.S. Embassy would

not be able to function effectively without UNMIL cooperation.

Liberia Sanctions

¶17. (C) Since the European Court of Justice decision on the Qadi case, there has been increasing international pressure to resolve the cases of individuals on the UN Asset Freeze and Travel Ban lists. However, two significant events in June argue a delay in any delistings. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will issue its final report at the end of June, which will include about 150 names (including perhaps many on the Travel Ban and Assets Freeze lists) to be recommended for prosecution. The TRC has conducted extensive hearings from both victims and alleged perpetrators of the 14-year civil war, and an inquiry unit of the TRC has analyzed the testimony and has sought corroborative evidence.

¶18. (C) At about the same time, the UN Panel of Experts (POE) will present its interim report, and will provide a database of all names, with both public and sensitive information gathered on the individuals and entities. That will enable the Sanctions Committee to make a more informed decision on delisting and allow for a substantive response when a delisting request is denied.

¶19. (C) It appears the GOL is moving closer to a decision to work with the POE in freezing and recovering assets from non-Liberians, primarily the arms dealers, transportation companies and financiers who profited from the civil war. However, an unfortunate leak of the discussions between the POE and GOL has forced President Sirleaf to deny publicly that the GOL is targetting any Liberians. Her primary motive appears to be that she does not want to galvanize a formidable opposition in the 2011 elections. The opposition is presently weak and in disarray, but if the pro-Taylor factions believe their livelihoods are in jeopardy they may move to finance a strong campaign against her.

¶20. (C) After June, the pressure will mount again to remove names and entities from the lists. The Liberian government needs to give a clear indication now as to where it wants the sanctions to go so that the international community can develop a new way forward on Liberian sanctions.

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